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RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR 0754  
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1187  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 3530  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0960  
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RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1343  
RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000266

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AF/S FOR B. NEULING  
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE  
AFR/SA FOR E. LOKEN  
COMMERCE FOR BECKY ERKUL

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ECON PHUM ZI  
SUBJECT: ZVOBGO ON ZANU-PF, CHANGE

REF: HARARE 200

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

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Summary  
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¶1. (C) Eddie Zvobgo, Jr., the popular son of Robert Mugabe's late principal intra-party rival of the last ten years, told the Ambassador on March 1 that the ZANU-PF faithful all recognized the need for substantive change, including realignment to the West. Nonetheless, change probably would wait for Mugabe's passage from the stage, he predicted, as most remained too cautious and fearful to push the octogenarian for now. He urged the USG to remain engaged with a country that desperately needed its help and would turn to it when the time came. He welcomed Arthur Mutambara's emergence as a political player but bluntly stated that ZANU-PF would continue to consciously exploit MDC divisions to its own advantage. End summary.

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Party Faithful Roiling but Patient  
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¶2. (C) A businessperson and ZANU-PF provincial official in Masvingo, Zvobgo told the Ambassador that party unity would likely remain intact for now, despite wide intra-party dissatisfaction and the collapsing economy. Zvobgo said that all would agree that Mugabe had outlived his time, but caution and fear borne of the party's history made open action to hasten his departure by aspiring successors or a disgruntled membership unlikely. Mugabe's stature as a founding father further inhibited action against him even if all regarded his policies as folly.

¶3. (C) That said, Zvobgo agreed that much was happening in the ruling party apart from Mugabe, but maintained that it all nonetheless revolved around Mugabe and his "disproportionate power." The leadership would continue to posture to him, even as they maneuvered behind the scenes to position themselves for his departure. He allowed that some individuals might "strike out on their own" if they felt their prospects waning too much - a circumstance Mugabe would seek to avoid.

¶4. (C) Asked by the Ambassador when Zimbabwe could reach a "breaking point", Zvobgo suggested that a true breaking point would require a revolt, which he did not see in the foreseeable future. He acknowledged that decline was accelerating, but asserted that there were still ways to make money, even in a hyperinflationary environment. Zimbabwe still had a long way down to go, and he did not know when it would hit bottom.

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Looking for Face-Saving Out  
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¶5. (C) Zvobgo confirmed that the leadership appreciated that the country was in too deep a hole to climb out without significant help from the West. Political realities would not permit them to overtly admit failure, he asserted, so the leadership needed a face-saving way out. Zvobgo suggested that the prime minister position under consideration in constitutional discussions might offer promise in this regard. A Prime Minister could work with the international community on necessary policy changes, effectively moving

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forward with reform but insulating the President from a "mea culpa" he could not swallow.

¶6. (C) Zvobgo asserted that recent developments such as the GOZ's dropping plans to nationalize fertilizer companies and amending its disastrous education bill indicated that many in the party "wanted to stop digging" the hole it was in. He suggested that the Senate had surprisingly proved some worth in this regard, especially elder statesman such as his Masvingo political ally Dzikamayi Mavhaire. He was optimistic that cooler heads could stem the impetus for bad policy while Mugabe remained in power.

¶7. (C) He urged the USG in any event to look for constructive ways to steer the country out of the mess for which ZANU-PF was undeniably responsible. He asserted that ZANU-PF would likely lead the country into the post-Mugabe era so it was in our mutual interest to cultivate more rapport. Zvobgo suggested that Mugabe's recent outreach to Blair represented a softening of rhetoric that could precede a softening posture; he urged the Ambassador to meet with Mugabe in this regard.

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On Mugabe's Departure  
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¶8. (C) Zvobgo would not venture a guess as to when Mugabe planned to step aside. Echoing conventional wisdom, he suggested Mugabe would not go until he felt sufficient confidence in a successor to protect him. In this vein, Mugabe had an interest in keeping all players off balance and in keeping succession unsettled. Zvobgo viewed Justice Minister Chinamasa's recent floating of three scenarios, one of which could keep Mugabe in place until 2010 (reftel), as indicative of Mugabe's intent to remain in the game for now. Mugabe could always find a pretext on which to remain as long as he wanted and had always defied prediction in any event.

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After Mugabe...  
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¶9. On the Ambassador's inquiry about post-Mugabe Zimbabwe, Zvobgo predicted there would be ferment but whoever emerged atop the party would have to be practical. This would require s/he reach out initially to heal internal divisions, at least until s/he became more confident to consolidate broader power. He agreed with the Ambassador that the next leader would have to deliver an economic turn around to stay in power and would need Western support to make that happen. He concluded that "a national sigh of relief" at Mugabe's passing would permit a successor some time and good will to administer unavoidably painful medicine.

¶10. (C) Zvobgo suggested the succession game had yet to be played out. He offered a positive portrayal of Vice President Joyce Mujuru as a "mother" figure - not well educated but effective in applying the common sense needed for political success. He acknowledged there was discomfort with her in some quarters but maintained it was too early to conclude that the President had "backed the wrong horse," with reference to rival Emmerson Mnangagwa. He said there were other possibilities as well, but dismissed RBZ Governor Gideon Gono and former Finance Minister Simba Makoni as talented individuals who lacked the political clout to emerge on top.

¶11. (C) The Ambassador stressed the importance of not

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permitting anyone with blood on their hands to remain in the post-Mugabe leadership if there was to be any hope of Western support. He further noted that the USG was not opposed to ZANU-PF per se and did not care about making anybody eat crow; bilateral relations, however, could not improve without the GOZ first implementing fundamental political and economic reforms. He observed that regime change would happen on its own if ZANU-PF continued its current policies and dug itself into a deeper hole but said the USG did not have an interest in seeing Zimbabwe collapse.

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ZANU-PF Exploiting MDC Divisions  
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¶12. (C) Zvobgo acknowledged that ZANU-PF had seen to the MDC pro-senate faction getting all the opposition's Z\$8 billion (US\$80,000 at the official exchange rate) entitlement under campaign finance laws. The ruling party continued to favor the pro-senate faction at the exclusion of the anti-senate faction, which posed a greater threat in view of Tsvangirai's broad appeal. ZANU-PF hoped that the party divisions would provoke by-elections for the opposition seats. In that event, he said the anti-senate faction would likely retain its Matabeleland representation but by exploiting MDC divisions, ZANU-PF could make significant inroads in other opposition constituencies. If neither faction pushed for by-elections, the GOZ might find a pretext on its own, he allowed. Zvobgo welcomed the emergence of Arthur Mutambira, a distant uncle who he said would stimulate needed debate on important issues.

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Comment  
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¶13. (C) One of the Mujuru camp's more engaging and pragmatic young turks, Zvobgo is a bridge figure with friends in the MDC and Mnangagwa camps. His candid insights into the party's restiveness buttress our conviction that ZANU-PF remains a party very uncertain of itself despite outward party discipline and Mugabe's unchallenged power. They further confirm our growing potential leverage here as the party lurches toward a different world in which it knows it cannot survive without the West.

DELL

SCHULTZ